

Reagan to Seek To Ease Tension With the Soviets

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President Reagan is expected to make a major speech soon on U.S.-Soviet relations that administration officials say is meant to send a positive signal to the Kremlin and entice it back into a dialogue that might lead to a more constructive relationship.

The presidential speech is expected to come before Jan. 18, when Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko are scheduled to meet in Stockholm at the opening of a 35-nation East-West conference on reducing the risks of war in Europe.

Officials here said the speech is meant to try to set a positive tone for that meeting, which is the first such encounter since last September, when the Soviet downing of a Korean jetliner produced a harsh clash in public and private between the two top diplomats.

Since then, the Soviets also have suspended all three sets of arms control negotiations that were in progress and relations have remained strained.

Administration officials, in interviews yesterday, said that a great deal of thought has been going into the state of relations with Moscow recently and that several tactics are being considered on how both to maintain pressure on Moscow, especially to return to the arms talks, yet remove obstacles that may be in the way of getting the relationship back to more normal status.

One element is the expected presidential speech, which administration officials described as a sign that Reagan was willing to deal with the

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Soviets, was serious about improving the relationship and would like to speed up that process. Officials said the speech has been under discussion between Reagan and Shultz since last summer, and was once considered for delivery in mid-December.

Delivering the speech so close to the Shultz-Gromyko meeting could leave the impression it is a maneuver to place the Soviets on the defense, officials said. But they insisted that this was not the case.

The basic thrust of the speech is expected to be a call for serious and practical dialogue, despite wide differences, on grounds that the world is too dangerous to let the situation fester. Domestically, such a speech would position Reagan politically as an advocate of dialogue when Democrats are criticizing him for contributing to the dangerous tensions.

The publicized meeting yesterday in the White House between Reagan and Ambassador James Goodby, chief of the U.S. delegation to the Stockholm conference, is another element.

Other elements, officials suggested, involve the likelihood that the administration will refrain from some of the harsh statements it has directed at the Soviets in the past.

Reagan already gave some indication of this when he was asked, in a Time magazine interview this week, whether he would again call the Soviets the "focus of evil" as he did in an earlier speech.

"No, I would not say say things like that again," he answered, "even after some of the things that have been done recently."

The administration also may refrain from making optimistic public statements, as they did in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of arms talks, about how the Soviets are likely to come back quickly to those talks because that may only make it more difficult for the Soviets to return.

Officials acknowledge that they have no idea whether Moscow would believe a new and more positive Reagan pitch on improving relations or whether the Soviet leadership is in a position to respond favorably even if inclined to do so because of the uncertain health and status of President Yuri V. Andropov.

By the same token, there is no indication that the White House at the moment has any plans to make substantive shifts in negotiating positions at the stalled Geneva talks on strategic and medium-range nuclear missiles.

Earlier this week Gromyko sharply criticized Reagan administration policies in what appeared to be a conscious effort to dampen any expectations that his meeting with Shultz was apt to lead to better relations.

Officials said January also "should be an interesting month" in U.S.-Soviet relations because, along with the effort to appear more forthcoming, it is likely that a White House report detailing alleged Soviet violations of past arms agreements will be sent to Congress.

Officials say this presents a challenge to the White House, which feels it must be straightforward about its concerns, yet would like to do so without destroying the prospects for future arms control. Some top officials believe it is possible to reconcile these seemingly incompatible goals.

They suggested that if the report is presented soon, at a time when no negotiations are under way, there is a better chance that it can be absorbed and reflected upon carefully by the public without necessarily jeopardizing future talks.

They also said that while it is highly unlikely that Moscow will ever admit to wrongdoing official publication of the complaints could deter Moscow from future actions skirting agreements.

Although a main complaint of the White House is said to focus on a new Soviet radar that may be a violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, officials said the administration has no intention of renouncing that treaty.